

RWANDA'S SECRET WAR

<http://zmagsite.zmag.org/Feb2005/snow0205.html>

Special Report

Rwanda's Secret War

*U.S.-backed destabilization of
Central Africa*



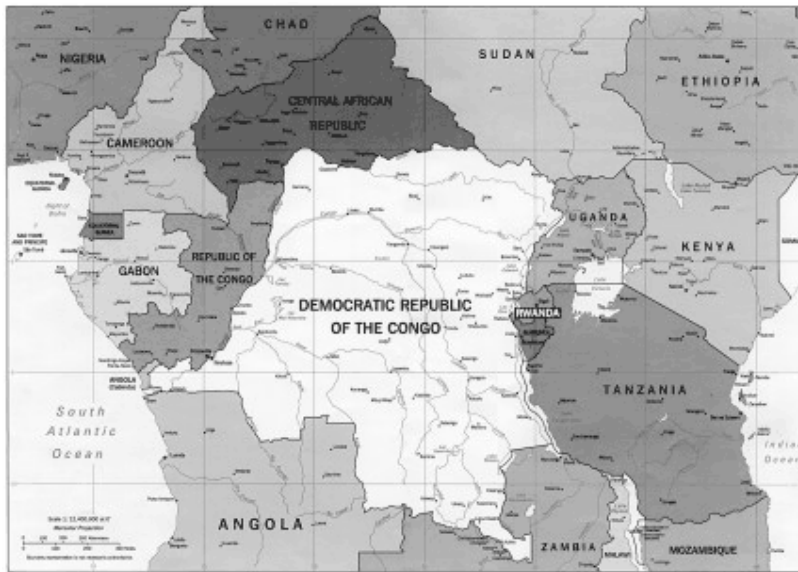
By [Keith Harmon Snow](#)

Printer friendly [version](#)

On November 26, 2004, television stations in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), began broadcasting alerts that a Rwandan invasion was underway. This followed days of repeated threats by President Paul Kagame to attack Hutu rebels based in the eastern DRC. Belgian and U.S. military sources in Kinshasa said that at least five battalions (1,500-3,000 troops) had penetrated the provinces of North and South Kivu from 5 different points. "This is a sizeable advance force for the Rwandan army," said one military source in Kinshasa.

With Rwanda's government continuing to deny their invasion, some 6,000 Rwandan troops had reportedly penetrated eastern DRC by December 4, making this tiny Rwanda's third major invasion of its huge neighbor to the west.

According to the DRC government, troops of the Armed Forces for the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) had clashed with Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) at numerous locations by early December. The *Monitor* newspaper in Uganda reported December 6 that RDF troops passing illegally through Ugandan frontier areas had also clashed with Ugandan soldiers. The *Monitor* reported thousands of Congolese refugees fleeing into Uganda.



According to IRIN, news network of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, thousands of Congolese civilians were fleeing North Kivu province as of December 6, with civilians claiming executions and massacres as RDF troops burned and looted everything in their path. NGO staff in the region are bracing for the flood of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons.

These claims were echoed by Rwandan guerrilla groups based in the DRC. "According to our sources five Rwandan battalions are already in the DRC ready to create chaos," reported Jean-Marie Higiroy, former leader of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). "Kagame's regime maintains its sponsorship to rebel DRC forces. Under all kinds of tricks, Kagame's regime is able to continue to pull the strings in the DRC."

He rejected claims that the Rwandan military is acting in self-defense. "Rwanda and its proxy armies in the DRC maintain an absolute cordon sanitaire at the Rwandan-Congolese border," Higiroy says. "How can Hutu rebels break through this cordon sanitaire and strike Rwanda, then retreat into the DRC without being intercepted?"

Higiroy alleges that powerful interests in Washington had, as early as 1989, delineated the now-apparent Tutsi strategy of annexation of the eastern DRC and that there is a very powerful Tutsi lobby in Washington, DC.

Rwanda's latest bid to annex the DRC's Kivu provinces was called the "Third War of Occupation of Eastern Congo" by Congolese students who took to the streets of Kisangani in protest on December 4. Despite Rwanda's official denials of aggression, Rwandan leaders had issued unambiguous warnings in recent days. "You have to make war to have peace," Rwanda's President Paul Kagame told United Nations Observer's Mission In Congo (MONUC) peacekeeping forces on November 23. "We are preparing to return our forces to the DRC," Rwanda's regional cooperation minister, Protais Mitali, said on the 25th, according to Reuters. "We cannot watch as these extremist forces advance onto our territory."

Reuter's correspondent David Lewis in Kinshasa reported on November 26 that the Congolese army told the United Nations that its soldiers had clashed with Rwandan troops inside the DRC, although UN peacekeepers found no signs of any fighting, according to Lewis's UN sources. Lewis also reported that clashes had taken place earlier in the week.

In Kinshasa, long-time Mobutu opposition party leader Etienne Tshisekedi from the Union for Democracy and Social Progress issued a communiqué warning that if Rwanda had again invaded the DRC, then the Congolese people must demonstrate against the UN Mission. May and June 2004 saw major demonstrations across the DRC where MONUC vehicles and homes rented by MONUC personnel were destroyed in protest of MONUC's perceived failure to defend the city of Goma from the invading forces of pro-Rwandan rebel groups in Congo. There are no U.S. military with the MONUC force in DRC.

Rwandan and Ugandan guerrilla groups continue to maintain a destabilizing presence in the eastern DRC, including the ex-Force Armée Rwandais (ex-FAR, the former Rwandan army), Interahamwe (the militia largely responsible for the 1994 genocide), Allied Democratic Forces for Uganda (ADF), and the People's Redemption Army (PRA). The DRC government and international community have failed to implement the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process called for by international peace accords.

Rwanda has repeatedly threatened to invade the DRC to attack Hutu rebels accused of genocide—Interahamwe and ex-FAR. The “genocidaires” fled Rwanda in 1994 and established themselves in Hutu refugee camps in eastern Zaire (as DRC was then known) with the help of the French intervention force Operation Tourquoise and support from Zaire's 32-year dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. Rwanda also claimed that it must defend the Banyamulenge—Congolese Tutsis—from the ongoing genocide.

MONUC entered the DRC in 1999 after peace agreements signed in Lusaka, Zambia.

Subsequent peace accords in Sun City, South Africa and negotiations with rebels and militias in the eastern DRC ushered in a peace process under a transitional power-sharing government, implementing a joint UN/DRC program of DDR, and the promise of elections in 2005.

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program has largely been an empty promise. The DRC was formally cited at the UN Security Council on November 23 for its lack of cooperation in the arrest of people accused of taking part in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In a UN press statement, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Hassan Bubacar Jallow from Gambia, told the Security Council that 14 indicted people were still at large and “the bulk of the fugitives continued to be based in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” The press release stated that the U.S. ambassador to the UN, John Danforth, called on the DRC and Kenya to arrest fugitives accused of inciting conflicts in the Great Lakes region on the border of DRC and Rwanda.

Impunity for government soldiers and guerrillas alike remains endemic in the eastern DRC provinces of Orientale, Equateur, and the Kivus. According to a recent alert by Survivor's Rights International, reports from isolated areas across the country indicate that populations continue to suffer wholesale extortion, racketeering, theft, rape, and other violence.

Rights groups accused all sides of exploiting ethnic conflict in the region. "Relations between the Banyamulenge and other Congolese groups have been strained and are frequently manipulated by politicians in both Rwanda and the DRC," wrote Human Rights Watch in a June 2004 report, "War Crimes in Bukavu." "The past six years of war have contributed to hostility against them as they are increasingly identified as 'Rwandan' by other Congolese. Rwanda has often justified its presence in DRC in part as an effort to protect the Banyamulenge people, though this was challenged in 2002 when they attacked the Banyamulenge homelands killing scores of Banyamulenge civilians, shooting some of them from Rwandan helicopters."

In a bold article that caught major international press on December 4, BBC journalist Robert Walker, who overflew the North Kivu region in a MONUC helicopter, reported that "President Kabila is getting away with a crime" because the DRC government was fabricating reports of war and Rwandan involvement in eastern DRC. However, by December 20, 2004, UNICEF was reporting "millions displaced by recent fighting."

Central Africa's Ongoing Genocide

Paul Kagame's Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, launching a four-year campaign of guerrilla warfare. Open support for Rwanda's then-Hutu-led government from French paratroopers failed to prevent the RPA victory of August 1994, following the coordinated genocide of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Tutsis by hard-line Hutus (FAR) and affiliated Interahamwe (Hutu) militias from April to July.

Critics such as Wayne Madsen, author of *Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa 1993-1999*, assert that Kagame and the RPA orchestrated the April 6, 1994 assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi—shooting down their plane on its approach to Kigali airport with SAM-7 surface-to-air missiles taken from Iraq by France in 1991, then delivered by the U.S. military to Uganda, the base for RPA guerrilla operations against Rwanda prior to 1994.

Evidence was provided at a special hearing held by then Congressperson Cynthia McKinney at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, DC on April 6, 2001, the seventh anniversary of the assassinations. Journalist Charles Onana of Cameroon, author of *The Secrets of the Rwandan Genocide*, also aired claims of RPA involvement in the incident and was sued for defamation by Paul Kagame. A Paris court found in favor of Onana. Defense attorneys working at the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR) maintain that the standard figure of 800,000 Tutsis killed in the 1994 genocide is grossly inflated. At least three major films



*UPDF soldiers celebrate their
warfighting capabilities
—photo from ww3report.com*

continue to circulate in the U.S., all furthering the pro-RPA and pro-Tutsi perspective of the Hutu genocide.

Paul Kagame, who was trained by the U.S. military at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, has been a regular visitor at Harvard University, the James Baker III Institute in Houston, Texas, the White House, and the Pentagon. U.S., European, and South African military interests have continued to support various factions in Central Africa, arming militias and rebel groups through proxy armies from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in south Sudan. France's presence in Central Africa is based out of Gabon, the major point of French military penetration on the continent.

Terror continued in Rwanda under the new RPA government of Paul Kagame, with Amnesty International documenting a pattern of assassinations, arbitrary imprisonment, and "disappearances." Nearly all political opponents—Tutsi or Hutu—have been labelled "genocidaires" and Amnesty International has protested that some trials and executions of accused genocidiare collaborators have been tainted and politically-motivated.

The first Rwandan invasion of its huge neighbor to the west occurred in 1996. According to the influential "Africa Confidential" newsletter, Major Gen. Paul Kagame visited the Pentagon in August 1996, conferring with Washington prior to launching a grand plan to unseat Mobutu Sese Seko. While the U.S. public was consumed with the 1996 presidential elections, Rwanda was preparing its war against Zaire. It began with the shelling of Hutu refugee camps in eastern Congo with Katusha missiles, killing non-combatants.

RPA joined with the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and the guerrilla army of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) in the "war of liberation" that subsequently ended long reign of President Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo (Zaire). Sources in the DRC quickly add that U.S. military personnel were seen advising the joint UPDF/RPA invasion which swiftly moved across the vast forested territory of Zaire.

Mobutu's generals were reportedly contacted in advance by high-level U.S. officials in the region; most of those who agreed to support the U.S. invasion remain in high posts in the DRC today; other of Mobutu's highest military were sacrificed one way or another.

Wayne Madsen reported that the U.S. established major communications and listening stations in Uganda's Ruwenzori Mountains. Witnesses interviewed in Kampala, Uganda's capital, support this claim. Communications equipment was also seen on Idjwe Island in Lake Kivu, on the DRC-Rwanda frontier.

Recent interviews with survivors across the country document crimes against humanity and acts of genocide committed against Congolese civilians by all sides in the ensuing war. "In May 1997, hundreds of unarmed Hutu refugees were massacred in the town of Mbandaka by soldiers of Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the

Liberation of Congo (ADFL), operating under apparent Rwandan Army (RPA) command,” wrote Human Rights Watch in June 1998. In an October 1997 report (“What Kabila is Hiding: Civilian Killings and Impunity in Congo”), Human Rights Watch concluded that “Rwandan troops had a role in some of the killings of Rwandan Hutu refugees on Zairean territory.”

Thousands of Hutu refugees were slaughtered in Mbandaka in May 1997, on the day that the AFDL arrived there. One eyewitness told this reporter: “We ran down to the beach [port] because we heard the shooting. I saw two people shot but there were bodies all lined up on the beach. The soldiers were also throwing dead bodies in the [Congo] river. There were a lot of Tutsi soldiers, but we couldn’t distinguish. I saw soldiers question one woman. The woman was not able to talk in [Congolese] Lingala. He said, ‘Yes, you are among the Rwandais Hutus. Turn, face the river, pray to your God, because you are about to meet your God.’ Then he shot her in the back with an automatic weapon.”

“U.S. special forces were involved,” asserted one DRC army captain interviewed recently in Kinshasa. The AFDL forces included UPDF, RPA, and U.S. military advisers, he claimed.

Colonel James Kabarebe, now Chief of Staff of the Rwanda Defense Forces, is said to have led the campaign to annihilate fleeing Hutu refugees. Kabarebe has been cited in UN reports for massive violations in Ituri. “Kabarebe was reportedly the biggest advocate of Rwandan support to [ethnic] militias,” wrote UN investigators in the MONUC “Special Report on Events in Ituri,” January 2002-December 2003. Rwanda armed, trained, and advised militias in Ituri, as it had in North and South Kivu provinces, the report found. The Ugandan military was similarly cited for atrocities.

The RPA joined with the UPDF to invade DRC again in 1998 after ADFL leader, Laurent Kabila, rejected U.S. and Bechtel Corporation plans for the newly liberated country and annulled mining contracts signed with some powerful Western companies before he had taken power—including America Mineral Fields, based in Hope, Arkansas and said to be linked to then-President Clinton through “Friend of Bill” investors. Kabila also ejected the Rwandan and Ugandan military allies that brought him to power.

The Congolese people call it the “war of aggression,” but it was dubbed “Africa’s First World War” by the western press, as it involved six regional nations, as well as arms and advisers from western countries. Troops from Rwanda and Uganda (now backing anti-Kabila rebels), as well as Zimbabwe (allied with the DRC government) worked with commercial agents to pilfer DRC’s ivory, diamonds, gold, timber, cobalt, and other natural resources. Foreign agents moved these plundered resources onto the international market, as militia groups raked in local profits.

At least 3.5 million people died due to warfare in the DRC, according to the International Rescue Committee report on the region. From 1999-2001, through networks of Rwandan military and commercial agents, Rwandan interests aligned with the state earned at least \$240 million in the sale of coltan (Columbo-tantalite)—a precious ore essential to Sony playstations, laptop computers, and cell phones. In

December 2000 alone the main RPA-supported rebel group in the DRC earned some \$600,000 in coltan sales. Coltan moved through criminal syndicates to U.S., Swiss, Belgian, and German clients. Rwandan syndicates continue to dominate the coltan trade out of eastern DRC, local sources claim.

Friends of the Earth and the UK-based group Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) filed a formal complaint with the U.S. State Department on August 4, 2004 against three U.S. companies accused by the UN Panel of Experts of fueling war. The UN panel's three-year investigation implicated Cabot Corporation (Boston), Eagle Wings Resources International, and George Forrest's OM Group (Ohio) in collaboration with various rebel groups trafficking in coltan from DRC. Current deputy director of the U.S. Treasury Department, Samuel Bodman, was CEO and chair of Cabot from 1997-2001.

It is important to note that the conflict in Central Africa revolves not around "governments" so much as militarized power blocks and multinational corporate alignments which are transnational. Thus while powerful U.S. government interests may back the Kagame and Museveni regimes in support of destabilization of Central Africa and the annexation of the Kivu and Orientale provinces, other powerful interests—such as the International Rescue Committee—maintain a constant international media presence that appears to be in conflict with that agenda, but which nevertheless exists as a major lobby in support of or defense of certain interests at the expense of certain others. Notable personalities on the IRC's Boards of Directors and Overseers include Morton Abramowitz, Tom Brokaw, and Henry Kissinger.

An Unraveling Peace Process

The DRC frontier with Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi has remained the locus of instability and guerrilla warfare since at least 1994—long before the first Rwandan invasion of Congo in 1996—and the rising insecurity and terrorism has all but annihilated the local civilian population. North and South Kivu provinces continue to suffer from widespread violence and killings in the Goma and Bukavu areas are rampant. The Ituri region of Orinetale Province, bordering on Uganda, Sudan, and the Central African Republic, is cited as one of the bloodiest corners of the world by numerous human rights agencies. The UN Security Council's "Special Report on Ituri," outlines the history of conflict in Ituri, the role of Ugandan and Rwandan government forces in arming factions, bombing villages, massacring and torturing civilians, and provoking and, at times, abetting, acts of genocide.

Given the rising insecurity in Ituri in recent months, with assassinations and nightly shootings, the population in Bunia increasingly sees MONUC as a hostile and aggressive force of foreign military occupation. Said one Bunia resident formerly employed by MONUC: "Public opinion is that MONUC has done nothing. People thought that MONUC came here to bring peace, but to their surprise people find that MONUC is like a spectator in a football match. People are dying in their presence. People are being terrorized in their presence. People are being killed in there presence and MONUC is doing nothing."

“Firing incidents occur daily,” admitted one public information officer for MONUC. “I don’t think there is any area except maybe in Bunia [town] where the human rights situation is improving.”

Reports of MONUC personnel buying and transporting contraband goods—leopard and okapi skins, gold, ivory—are also widespread; one western photojournalist witnessed Belgian troops openly purchasing ivory; troops are immune to customs search and seizure.

Arms continue to flow into the region. Uganda’s government newspaper the *New Vision* reported on November 23 that arms shipments reportedly destined for the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), a regional militia aligned with Rwanda, were seized by the Armed Forces of the Congolese People (FAPC), a rival Congolese militia in control of the lucrative Ituri Province customs posts in northeastern DRC.

“According to local sources, local government officials have delivered firearms to civilians in Masisi, North Kivu, long the site of conflict between different political and military groups,” wrote Human Rights Watch on November 19. “Other shipments have been delivered to Ituri, another persistently troubled area in northeastern Congo. UN sources reported that some 300 Congolese high school students, refugees in neighboring Rwanda, abruptly left their schools and are said to be undergoing military training.”

According to recent reports from northern Ituri, the FAPC has reportedly executed child soldiers seeking to enter the DDR process and attacked the families and looted the homes of reintegrated ex-child soldiers. The UPC and the Force for National Liberation, another militia, continue to extort a weekly war tax from citizens, persecute those who refuse to comply, and terrorize the citizenry.

“All armed groups in Ituri have integrated children into their ranks,” wrote MONUC investigators. MONUC conservatively estimated “at least 40 percent of each militia force is children below the age of 18, with a significant minority below the age of 15.” The MONUC investigation found that Ugandan and Rwandan military were frequently training children abducted and forcibly or willingly recruited into DRC militias. MONUC documented cases where hundreds of children were taken by road or plane to Uganda or Rwanda for military training.

The UPC and the Force for National Liberation continue to extort a weekly war tax from citizens, persecute those who refuse to comply, and terrorize the citizenry. Said one witness, “The UPC is collecting money. They say, ‘Either you pay 100 francs Congolese or we come at night.’ Then when they come they cut off your hand or violate women.”

“Sexual violence is a national epidemic in DR Congo,” wrote Survivors Rights International (SRI) in a December 5, 2004 alert, “involving all military factions, both current and past military forces involved in the internal affairs of the DRC, and it appears to be sanctioned by all levels of military command.

SRI also reported that the presence of hundreds of internally displaced girls and women currently resident in Mbandaka has spawned commerce in prostitution and



The open pit mines are an environmental nightmare—photo by Keith Harmon Snow

survival sex involving both Armed Forces of Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and MONUC troops. “FARDC further prey on female sex workers by forcing sexual relations, raping those who refuse, and universally robbing desperate females of their livelihood,” SRI wrote.

Forgotten Resource Wars

Rwanda and Uganda continue to benefit from high-level military arrangements with the United States. Entebbe, Uganda is a forward base for U.S. Air Force operations in Central Africa. According to the Global Policy watchdog, there are 11 U.S. servicepeople permanently stationed in Entebbe. Sources in Uganda and the DRC confirm that weapons move freely through Entebbe airport from U.S. interests. The BBC reported March 23, 2004 that U.S. General Charles Wald confirmed that the U.S. is directly involved in the fight against the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. “I have met with [Uganda’s] President Museveni,” Wald reported on the BBC. “I have heard personally that he is very pleased with the support we are giving him.... Its not just moral support.... But many things need to be kept a bit more private.”

In July 2004, members of the DRC military flew to Tampa, Florida to participate in an unfolding U.S. “anti-terrorism” military program called Golden Spear.

The Canadian mining firms Barrick Gold and Heritage Oil & Gas arrived with the Ugandan and Rwandan military during the “war of aggression” to exploit mining opportunities in the north. Barrick principals include former Canadian premier Brian Mulroney and former U.S. president George H.W. Bush. Heritage has secured contracts for the vast oil reserves of Semliki basin, beneath Lake Albert, on both the Congolese and Ugandan sides of the border. Heritage is reportedly tapping the Semliki petroleum reserves from the Ugandan side, where a huge pipeline to Mombasa, Kenya, worth billions of dollars, is now in the works.

According to a petroleum futures report (*Africafront*), Heritage Oil was poised to exploit the northern Lake Albert basin, southern Lake Albert basin, River Semliki basin, and Lake George and Lake Albert basin areas in partnership with the Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB) of China. Heritage is currently exploiting petroleum in neighboring war-torn Congo-Brazzaville in partnership with ZPEB. Notably, ZPEB is the petroleum firm currently operating behind the genocide of indigenous Anuak people in southeastern Ethiopia (see the December 12, 2004 report by Genocide Watch: “Operation Sunny Mountain”).

Ashanti Goldfields has reportedly secured a contract for the vast gold reserves at Mongwalu, north of Bunia. Ashanti has ties to South Africa and the British Crown and some sources in Bunia report that the Ashanti interest in nearby Mongwalu is guarded by Nepalese Gurkhas, possibly of the Gurkha Security Group based in Britain. The Clintonite multinational America Mineral Fields in May 2004 changed its name to Adastra Minerals and the corporation has multi-billion dollar copper and

cobalt mining projects underway, in partnership with the Kabila government, in Katanga province. Elsewhere in DRC, major foreign mining and logging contracts are underway.

Meanwhile the death toll in Congo's war has easily exceeded five million people.

Keith Harmon snow is a journalist and photographer. His work has appeared in publications in the U.S., UK, and Japan.

An earlier version of this article first appeared in WW4 Report, www.ww4report.com.

<http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/Africa/DRC.asp>

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Africa/Rwanda_Secret_War.html

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1174>